



Representation of Childhood Trauma in *Ice-Candy Man*

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Received: 30 Nov 2024; Received in revised form: 23 Dec 2024; Accepted: 25 Dec 2024; Available online: 31 Dec 2024

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Abstract— The present paper analyses the depiction of childhood trauma in the novel *Ice Candy Man*, also known as *Cracking India* 1988, by Bapsi Sidhwa, focusing on how the drastic event of Indian partition led to the psychological effects on Child characters through the lens of Lenore Terr's theoretical framework, which incorporates acute and chronic trauma that must be examined. By applying her concepts, the paper explores the psychological consequences of exposure to violence and feelings of loss as experienced by Lenny and other young characters. It showcases how these unpleasant, traumatic events depict disturbing behaviour, sick and shattered memories, silence, and emotional numbing. The paper also addresses how the socio-political ups and downs and devastating upheaval because of partition drastically wounded the minds of children and affected their cognitive and emotional development. Furthermore, this analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of how the psychological scars of the Partition continue to shape the identity and subjectivity of the children who suffered and lived through it.



Keywords— Childhood trauma, Memory, *Ice-Candy Man*, Partition, Trauma, Violence.

When we see the history of human existence, throughout history, violence and destruction are found in so many ways. Some groups have experienced violent displacements from their native place, such as the Jewish people who moved out of Germany, Rohingya Muslims from Bangladesh, Arabs from Palestine, Kashmiri Pandits from Kashmir, and Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka. Similarly, the partition of India had a major impact on human history, which led to deep psychological trauma for those who were affected badly. The Partition of India in August 1947, which created India and Pakistan, was driven by the Muslim League's demand for a separate homeland due to fears of Muslim marginalization in a Hindu-majority government. The League's influence grew during World War II, especially in Punjab, as the Congress leadership was imprisoned and local support for the Unionist Party dwindled. Despite winning the majority of Muslim seats in 1946, the League struggled to form a government in Punjab. Communal violence erupted in Bengal that year and quickly spread, culminating in the bloody riots of 1947, overseen by Lord Mountbatten as the last British Viceroy (Talbot 403).

Krzysztof Mikołajczuk, in the article entitled "Different Forms of Violence- Selected Issues", presented the views that violence is "multi-faceted and multi-coloured," often hidden within the "collusion of silence" that surrounds families and communities (104). This perspective perfectly blends with the character of Dilnawaz (Ice candy man) of the novel, whose transformation from a loving and charming street vendor to a violent person due to the political upheaval of the partition, reveals the social collapse and dominance of power. Whereas Lenny's childhood has become a mirror of destruction, the outer and inner walls of personality and psychology. Ayah's abduction by Dilnawaz (Ice candy man) also became both a product and an agent of violence that partition reveals gradually. His violent actions are not only a sudden reaction to the bloodshed or destruction but also a deeper truth, which has a hidden motive to gain power, not to survive, but to take revenge and harm others. In this way, the novel highlights both the loss of innocence and the cruelty of the adults, which shapes the personality of children. Mikołajczuk points out, "... man, although superior to animals, not only due to his reason and the ability to control

emotions, but also because he makes and observes norms that ban the use of violence, often resorts to violence and aggression against the weaker and those who are close to him” (104).

The partition brought the torn families apart, the huge displacement, and a drastic struggle to live their lives and rebuild them in a catastrophic situation. The physical and mental condition of people has been wounded under the horrific experiences of partition. They went through a deep, unbearable grief and loss because of the violent situation. The trauma of Partition continues to shape both individual lives and shared histories, affecting those who experienced it and future generations. This lasting impact of trauma is felt in the form of unresolved grief, cultural dislocation, and a constant struggle to heal. Even today, the scars of Partition remain a powerful force in shaping the identities of millions. Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event caused by intense stress or psychological harm. Caruth, in her influential book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), introduced trauma as it is not always fully experienced at the moment it occurs. Instead, it often returns later in life in the form of flashbacks, nightmares, or other emotional disturbances. She emphasizes that trauma is not defined solely by the original event, but by how the mind was unable to fully process it when it happened. This condition stays hidden and can come back later in unexpected ways. It might show up as flashbacks, nightmares, or strong emotions (91).

In the context of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, the trauma experienced by the child characters sheds light on how they are not able to understand the outer world and the cruelty that people have. During the partition, the whole incident is documented in the novel, explained by the child protagonist Lanny, who is unaware of the reality of the surrounding situation and people. Through applying the theory of Lenore Terr, the catastrophic incidents can be analysed and elaborated because Terr talks about the distinction of acute and chronic trauma, which are prevalent in the lives of children who witnessed the violence in partition. She talks about the condition of children who faced trauma. She says that it is an unexpected event that shakes the child to their core, and the impact is so intense and frightening that it overwhelms their ability to deal with it. This kind of trauma can feel life-threatening and leave a lasting impact. In her book *Too Scared to Cry: Psychiatric Trauma in Childhood*, she says “a sudden, unexpected, and potentially life-threatening event that overwhelms the child's capacity to cope” (3).

In the scenario of partition, violence is the most important aspect that leads thousands of lives to remain silent and vulnerable. At the time of migration, some people

suffered physical, mental, and emotional violence that wounded them for a long time, as well as children who witnessed the most drastic childhood in the absence of caregivers and loved ones. In the ChildHub review, Javanaud highlights the awareness regarding the impacts of violence against children, which resulted in them having serious psychological problems. They face long-term effects that deeply damage their ability to cope and leave lasting scars on their mental well-being. This simply connects the dots with Lenny in the novel, who is indirectly traumatized by seeing unpleasant scenes. She displays similar signs of emotional numbness, fear, and upheaval of emotions. Terr further explains this, showing how exposure to violence disrupts children's ability to process emotions and can lead to long-term psychological scars. Just like Jacquin's observation that the effects of violence can surface later in life, the trauma Lenny faces continues to affect her even after the immediate events. Both critics highlight how children's emotional development is disrupted by violence, but Jacquin focuses more on the social and behavioral outcomes, while Terr emphasizes dissociation and delayed trauma. Both perspectives help us understand the lasting impact of the Partition on the children in *Ice-Candy Man*.

Joy D. Osofsky, in the article “The Impact of Violence on Children”, said that according to his research, children who witness some kind of violence in their communities and surroundings often develop symptoms of anxiety, depression, and aggressive behaviour in their personality. He illustrated that violence deeply affects school-going children, leaving them restless at night, less motivated, and burdened by troubling thoughts. In severe cases, they may even show signs of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Such children often carry invisible wounds that interfere with their ability to learn, connect, and grow. Without proper care and support, these struggles can shape the way they see themselves and the world around them (39). Similarly, Terr also gave insights about the effects of violence, which highlights the mental disturbance of Lenny. According to Terr, a child faces repeated violence or threats and finds it hard to handle their emotions healthily because they start feeling discomfort and gloominess, as well as become aggressive in nature. Through these incidents, we can find that behaviours are not just surface responses but the deep psychological damage caused by trauma (323). A similar pattern can be seen in the case of Lanny, who was under an unbearable and disturbing environment, because of which she got disturbing nightmares. She says, “I awake every morning to the lion's roar. He sets about it at the crack of dawn, blighting my dreams” (Sidhwa 24). These lines reflect the depth of her troubled unconscious mind. The lion symbolizes violence, bloodshed, and cruelty, revealing her

inner fear that, even in seemingly safe spaces, the impact of past traumatic events continues to haunt her. This image of cruelty and bloodshed can also be linked to the larger violence within the community, where groups remain in constant conflict with one another.

It is possible to define childhood trauma as a dangerous problem in human society that holds the factors that plague children from the very foundation. Similarly, an adult person who has undergone childhood trauma may experience pain and problems such as Borderline Personality Disorder or self-mutilation, which can be linked to traumatic memories of early life. Childhood trauma also disrupts emotional development, making it difficult for survivors to build trusting relationships later in life. The scars of early abuse or neglect often resurface in the form of anxiety, depression, and difficulty in coping with stress. Thus, the effects of trauma extend beyond childhood, shaping personality and influencing overall mental health throughout adulthood (Terr 322).

When the people do not genuinely understand what a child is going through, childhood trauma can be gravely misinterpreted because it does not always present itself in the same manner; sometimes it takes the form of a single, unexpected incident that instantly alters everything, such as a severe accident or the unexpected death of a parent. This is referred to as Type I trauma, and often leaves a child deeply shaken, haunted by fears that they never explain, carrying emotional wounds. It holds onto memories that feel all too real, as if the event were still happening. In some cases, trauma develops gradually over a period of time as a result of recurrent abuse, neglect, or continuous exposure to instability or violence. This is called Type II trauma, which tends to become more deeply ingrained and mold the child's entire life, their worldview, and identity. They might lose more than one memory. Terr gave deeper insights by examining four important patterns to have a better understanding of how a person carries this sorrow. The visualization of Type I and Type II trauma is powerfully reflected in *Ice-Candy Man* through the experiences of the child characters. In the case of Lenny, it becomes a clear embodiment of Type I trauma, where she is suddenly struck by a sudden, emotionally shattering event that leaves a deep psychological imprint. As an innocent girl, she first witnesses an act of betrayal so personal and traumatic that it alters her perception of trust and safety because it comes not from a stranger, but from Ice-Candy Man, someone she believed to be gentle, familiar, and trustworthy. When Ayah is abducted with Ice-Candy Man's involvement, Lenny is thrown into a state of shock and confusion. This terrifying and appalling moment defines a crack in her innocence. The guilt that followed her was intense, and she regretted revealing Ayah's hiding place; this realization haunts her.

This incident remained with her, surfacing in flashbacks and moments of emotional withdrawal. She relives the horror in her mind, the images and sounds returning to her in a fragmented way, making her feel helpless and responsible all over again. These intrusive memories reflect the essence of Type I trauma: Lenny's internal struggle, her guilt, confusion, and loss of trust are not just emotional responses, but signs of a wounded psyche trying to process a world that no longer feels safe or predictable.

For three days I stand in front of the bathroom mirror staring at my tongue. I hold the vile, truth-infected thing between my fingers and try to wrench it out: but slippery and slick as a fish it slips from my fingers and mocks me with its sharp rapier tip darting as poisonous as a snake. I punish it with rigorous scourings from my prickling toothbrush until it is sore and bleeding. I'm so conscious of its unwelcome presence at all times that it swells un-comfortably in my mouth and gags and chokes me. (Sidhwa 184)

Simultaneously, Ranna, on the other side, because of the brutal communal riots during partition, his entire family and village were massacred in a horrific attack. Ranna survives the mass murder by hiding among the corpses, pretending to be dead for days. He becomes deeply traumatized and wanders alone through the chaos until he eventually finds refuge in a relief camp. Later, he recounts his harrowing experience to Lenny's godmother and others, providing a chilling, first-person account of the atrocities he witnessed. His story stands as a powerful testament to the human cost of Partition, especially on innocent children. Ranna provided the specific and graphic details of what happened exactly, and the recollections were filled with violence, bloodshed, and the murder of his relatives in front of his eyes. This sudden and overwhelming exposure of a catastrophic situation exemplifies the characteristics of Type I trauma that shatter a person's sense of safety and reality. "Ranna saw his uncles beheaded. His older brothers, his cousins" (Sidhwa 201). Ranna's description of the scene of the massacre clearly depicted the condition of his mind; he was drastically affected by the death of his family members and all relatives in front of his eyes. The profound psychological burden he bears after surviving such a catastrophic event illustrates how this one incident leaves an enduring imprint on his identity and mental state, which is central to the concept of Type I trauma. Ranna's statement, "It is funny, Ranna says. 'As long as I had to look out for myself, I was all right. As soon as I felt safe, I fainted'" (Sidhwa 205). This quote shows the complexities of the psychological effects of traumatic events upon little Ranna. He managed to stay strong and alert despite being in danger. His survival instincts helped him stay alive, but as

soon as he felt safe, his body fainted, which shows how the fear and pain he had been holding back finally took over. His fainting was not only a physical hardship to cope with painful experiences, but it was a sign that his mind and body were deeply affected by what he had gone through. Van der Kolk, in his book *The Body Keeps the Score*, clearly explained the relationship between trauma and its effects on body and mind. When a child experiences intense trauma, their body and mind become overwhelmed due to the effect of it, making it hard to process physical sensations and emotions healthily. In the initial stage, children are still developing, and because of this disruption, it can cause them long-lasting health problems, and they find it difficult to connect with their own bodies. Sometimes they find themselves confused about what they are experiencing and what is happening inside them. This loss of connection between body and mind can wound them deeply and slow down their healing. Showing trauma does not just affect a child's thoughts, but also their whole sense of self and wellbeing. Kolk states, "When trauma overwhelms the body's system, it can disrupt the processing of physical and emotional sensations, leading to physical health problems and profound loss of connection with the body" (109).

Similarly, Lenny's Type I trauma affects her so deeply that her body and mind both struggle with traumatic memories and painful scenarios, along with the feelings inside that put her into a puzzled condition. The friction of the feelings and memories becomes so vast that she continuously hurts herself as a result of guilt. The incident of rubbing her tongue is a clear announcement of her regressive condition. Through this act, it is clearly depicted that her body reacts to the overwhelming stress she carries with her, supporting the arguments given by Kolk. Lenny's disconnection and discomfort make her feel like a stranger in her own body, which is how trauma can hurt a child, where pain is not just emotional but also two-tangled in a way that is hard to explain. Lenny's disability adds one more layer to her limitations in doing something. As a disabled child, she was already struggling with her limited body, and later it became more uncomfortable with her swallowed tongue, which now became a symbol of disability. This discomfort, combined with emotional pain that is deeply intertwined in her consciousness, leads her into a trap in her own body.

Radha S. Gautam, in the article entitled "Child as a Narrator in *Cracking India*", examines how the whole story is narrated through the eyes of Lenny Sethi and her point of view related to sexuality, destruction, and violence, and discusses how it is in the horrific environment. She lost her innocence through memories and how a child's perspectives work in the story, making us aware of the real scenario of her time at a sensitive age. Furthermore, he highlights the

observation by quoting, "The most traumatic event that Lenny witnesses is the sight of kidnapping of her beloved Ayah. This scene changes Lenny's world forever. This is a point Ayah loses her purity and Lenny her innocence. Because of her truth, Lenny will remain guilty of being responsible for Ayah's kidnapping. A significant change takes place within Lenny as a result of Ayah's abduction" (522).

Lenore Terr explained Type II Trauma as the emotional harm that happens when a child is exposed to very drastic and painful experiences repeatedly over a period of time. In the initial stage, these events are so shocking that the child cannot understand what is happening to them. These situations may feel unreal sometimes, making the child on the verge of numbing or trying to ignore the pain. Because of these continuous traumatic events, the child starts to change inside. They no longer see these events as surprising; instead, they begin to expect danger, thinking that harm is just a normal part of life. This change affects them both emotionally and mentally. To deal with and cope with the threats around them, the child builds defenses that change their personality. They might become distant, overly alert, aggressive, or withdrawn. These changes are not just temporary; they become part of who the child is. Over time, the trauma affects not only their feelings but also their identity, impacting how they view themselves, their relationships, and the world around them (Terr 328).

In the case of Lenny, she becomes disrupted and confused because of the sudden changes due to the partition tension. All the characters who survived the crack became enemies to each other in front of the eyes of Lenny, where, once upon a time, a really liberal relationship had existed. Trustworthy people once became suspects. During the partition, her repeated encounters with violence, brutality, and emotional conflicts start to affect her psyche and push her away from emotional attachments. Lenny provides a compelling portrayal of Type II trauma, which emerges from extensive and continuous exposure to traumatic events. As a child living through the horrors of the Partition of India, Lenny becomes a silent witness to extreme acts of violence, including annihilation, murder, rapes, and brutal killings. These events do not pass through her without consequence; instead, they shape her internal world in ways she cannot fully understand or control. Cathy Caruth, in her influential work on trauma theory, *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative and History*, argues that, "Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (91). This theoretical framework is evident in analysing Lenny's disturbing act of tearing apart her

celluloid doll. In this scene, Lenny aggressively commands her brother Adi to help her pull the doll apart, and when it finally splits open, spilling its insides, she collapses, sobbing. This act mirrors the horrific violence she witnessed when a man was physically torn apart by a mob during a riot. This image left an unforgettable mark on her psyche (Sidhwa 138). This act became a symbol of loss and destruction, reflecting Lenny's internalized trauma and loss of innocence. Her hysterical reaction and physical collapse indicate classic symptoms of trauma, including emotional dysregulation, uncontrollable pain and grief, and dissociation. She was also dealing with the issues of sleeplessness and growing anxiety level, which reveal the long-term psychological consequences of living in an environment where violence becomes normalized. The 'Ma-ma' sound of the doll and blinking eyes, once a sign of her comfort, now feels like a strangely haunting sound in the middle of so much chaos. This scene also shows that her pain is not because of a singular event but a result of a much bigger tragedy. The fear, confusion, and heartbreak, a confusing and disturbing state of mind, are part of the larger trauma of Partition, a painful moment in history that exhausted the lives of countless people. Lenny was deeply vulnerable, showing how children are never truly protected from the emotional scars of violent events in history. Her story clearly shows how Type II trauma, the kind that comes from repeated exposure to fear and violence, does not just fade once the events are over. Instead, it stays with a person, shaping their memories, emotions, actions, and even the way they speak and think as they try to understand a world that no longer feels safe or whole.

Furthermore, the representation of Type II trauma deeply involves a prolonged and repetitive exposure to traumatic events, which affects Ranna's psyche and cognitivism. As a child, Ranna continuously witnessed violent incidents for survival. These catastrophic incidents marked his life with relentless loss and survival. The brutal killing of his entire family was a one-time, sudden shock for him. Still, on the other hand, mass killing, bloodshed, brutal murders, and a series of traumatic experiences led him to Type II trauma, which consists of emotional numbing, fragmented memories, and a sense of safety as well. Ranna became the direct witness of the traumatic event and went through physical pain to save his life. His silence upon returning reflects a psychological impact as well as a defense mechanism, which shows in the traumatic children after chaotic events. Rama became withdrawn and lost his innocence, replaced by a haunting reality of human cruelty (Sidhwa 195-208).

Lenore Terr talks about numbing in children after facing Type II trauma that resulted from the continuation of violent acts, which leads a child into stress. It affects them

differently as they shut themselves emotionally and keep themselves distant from others. She quotes, "Children who experience type II traumas do not complain of going "numb." The sense of going dead depends upon years of subjectively knowing what it was to feel alive. On the other hand, children who have been repeatedly brutalized or terrorized do exhibit massive denial to the eyes of the trained observer. Such children avoid talking about themselves"(329).

Van der Kolk, in his book, also discusses the condition of numbing in children who have been disturbed by unpleasant experiences in their lives. He stressed the term coping mechanism, which a child uses to deal with overwhelming feelings, especially when something disturbing happens to them (144).

In conclusion, we can say that *Ice Candy Man* offers a detailed insight into the portrayal of the partition of India, which unveils the psychological trauma of children. Through the Lenore Terr framework, Lenny and Ranna experienced both Type I Trauma of ayah's abduction and brutal murder of the whole family of Ranna in front of his eyes, and the representation of Type II Trauma is reflected in both the child characters as a result of ongoing guilt, silence, and emotional numbness. Van Der Kolk's research in *Body Keeps the Score* supports the related arguments regarding traumatic experiences that are intertwined in the body and mind, which is how the minds of children are shaped by silence, fear, loneliness, guilt, betrayal, and lack of trust. After encountering these catastrophic events, their emotional and psychological growth was disrupted. Sidhwa's novel reminds us that historical violence and the actions of adults shape a child's understanding of society.

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